

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 PM by the Chairman, Mr. Carpender, and the following members were present:

Mr. Richard Carpender, Chair	Mrs. Marge Levesque, Clerk	Ms. Marilyn King
Ms. Sylvia Wedge, Vice Chair	Mr. Michael Buddemeyer	Ms. Angela Volpicelli
	Mr. Jamie Heaney	

Also Present: Dr. Lusi, Christine Tague, Patti Cofield,

Absent: Colleen Jermain and Amy Larsen

A motion was made by Mrs. King to adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to R.I. Law 42-46-5, Exceptions (a)(1) Job Performance/Personnel Matters, and (a)(2) Collective Bargaining and/or Litigation. Seconded by Ms. Wedge. So voted 7-0.

Public Session recessed at 6:10 PM and resumed at 7:00 PM.

1. **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** Mr. Carpender reported that an Executive Session was held prior to this meeting, and one vote was taken. The motion made by Mrs. King and seconded by Ms. Wedge was approved unanimously. A motion to seal the minutes was made by Mrs. Levesque and seconded by Ms. Wedge. So voted 7-0. Mr. Carpender announced that beginning this evening, the use of the Sign-in Sheet for questions from the audience was being suspended. He also announced that on Friday, February 6th, at 8:30 AM, there is a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new branch of NewportFed in Portsmouth. On Saturday, February 7th, the Barrington School Committee will be holding a meeting with Gary Sasse from RIPEC regarding the current economic crisis at Barrington Middle School. Ms. Wedge announced that she attended a meeting at The Interlocal Trust last Thursday with Mrs. King, Ms. Volpicelli, and Mrs. Levesque. She stated that they were advised that only one person should speak to reporters regarding the school system, and that should be Dr. Lusi. They were also informed that there was a surplus of money, and we would be getting a rebate from The Trust.
2. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:** Dr. Lusi welcomed everyone to the meeting. She reported that the NECAP results just came out from the state on the reading, math, and writing assessments that were taken this past fall in Grades 3 through 8 and Grade 11. She was very pleased to see that we went up in every category, with the exception of one, which remained level; and she wants the scores to continue to go up and improve. She congratulated our staff and students for their progress. Dr. Lusi reported that she attended a meeting of the Elmhurst Parent Teacher Organization last night, and she distributed copies of Mr. McDaid's blog regarding that meeting to the Committee. She stated that Mr. McDaid did a very good job capturing the discussion. She thanked the Elmhurst parents who participated.

Dr. Lusi informed the committee that she is in the process of providing information to RIPEC for the study of potential regionalization and sharing of services across Aquidneck Island. The RIPEC report is supposed to be ready towards the end of February. Dr. Lusi reported that there's been a lot of attention in the press to the forthcoming stimulus package from the federal level; however, we have very limited information on that. Portsmouth may receive \$89,000 for facilities issues and a little over \$300,000 in IDEA/Special Education funding. We have no information on strings that may be attached to those funds.

a) Teaching and Learning: No Report.

b) Finance and Operations: Ms. Tague reported that our food service contract is up for renewal on June 30, 2009, and we've utilized all of our extensions. Therefore, we have to go out to bid. Previously the committee supported EBEC to proceed with an RFP. The state has not mandated yet, however, there is pending legislation to mandate that we go with Aramark, the state contract. We received a letter from Carolyn Dias expressing her concerns with EBEC still continuing with an RFP. In her letter, she indicates that they feel the RFP process and award to Aramark did show a competitive advantage of having a statewide proposal, however, the Collaborative disagrees because at the time, it was a non-mandatory item. Ms. Tague stated that if you have all 36 districts with one vendor, it will have a further impact on cost proposals because vendors will work harder to get the bid. EBEC is looking for each district's response as to whether we want to proceed. Mr. Carpenter stated that it is unfortunate that the state is going to mandate contracts. He feels we should certainly have the option to opt out. Ms. Tague stated that the bill to mandate a single statewide bid is being heard in committee next week.

c) High School Liaison: Absent.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. King to approve the minutes of the meeting held December 16, 2008. So voted. The January 13, 2009, minutes were removed from the agenda.

4. SPOTLIGHT

a) **Wind Turbine at PHS**. A motion was made by Ms. Wedge to give a certificate of appreciation to the Portsmouth Economic Development Committee, represented by Gary Gump and Richard Talipsky, for their efforts on the Portsmouth High School wind turbine project. Seconded by Mrs. Levesque. So voted 7-0. Mr. Talipsky noted that this project is going on with the cooperation of many people. He announced that the three turbine blades were delivered today, and it went flawlessly. Information and photos of the process are available online at www.Portsmouthrienergy.com. He stated that the turbine should be making power during the second week in February.

- b) **PHS Winners of RI Scholastic Arts Competition.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge to commend Portsmouth High School students Randolph Wicks, Craig Nelson, Katie Ryan, Chelsea Greene, and Brianna Hoftun, for receiving Fine Arts Awards from the Rhode Island Scholastic Arts Competition. Seconded by Mr. Heaney. So voted 7-0.

5. **CONSENT AGENDA**

- a) **Clerical Retirement.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge to accept the resignation for retirement of Rosalie Maher, from the position of Clerk, Category A, at Portsmouth High School, effective with the last day of the 2008-09 school year. Seconded by Mrs. Levesque. So voted 7-0.

6. **BUSINESS AGENDA**

- a) **Approval of High School Program of Studies.** Mr. Littlefield explained the changes in the Program of Studies. In social studies, the elective American Civics was added because the current program of studies in social studies does not properly address the national standards for civics education. Mr. Littlefield proposed introducing this course as a 1-semester elective. To offset the enrollment and impact on teachers' schedules, sections of Youth in the Law and Eastern Religions will be cancelled. In English and math, the SAT Prep course was added as a 1-semester elective course to prepare juniors to take the SAT. The course would be team-taught by a member of the math department and the English department. The curriculum would include review of math concepts, vocabulary, critical reading, as well as test-taking strategies. The fall semester course would be designed to prepare juniors to take the SAT in March. The spring semester would prepare juniors to take the test in June or October. In science, there is a change in the course requirement for sophomores in Chemistry. All students will be required to successfully complete a science fair project. In computers, there is a change in the course description/curriculum for Computer Concepts to include preparation for Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification; focus is on providing students with the skills necessary for success in the PHS diploma plan (including Senior Project). Topics will include using technology for exploring career interests and maintaining a personal learning plan, introduction to programming, multimedia presentations and on-line collaborative learning tools. In addition, a computer disclaimer is being added to indicate that the Portsmouth School Department is considering revision of the technology curriculum K-12, which may result in changes to the Portsmouth High School computer curriculum after printing of the program of studies. A motion was made by Mrs. Levesque to accept the Program of Study as presented. Seconded by Ms. Wedge. So voted 7-0.
- b) **Approval of Guidelines for Revenues/Expenditures of Wind Turbine Enterprise Fund.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge to approve in concept the 'Wind Turbine Generator Enterprise Fund: Guidelines for Revenues and Expenditures,' as presented.

Seconded by Mrs. Levesque. Mr. Carpender stated that these were the same guidelines that were passed by the Council at last week's joint meeting, and the purpose is to try to define over the course of a year how the expenditures would be shared between the Town and School Committee. He added that the numbers are estimated. Dr. Lusi stated that the town and the schools would split the benefits and costs of the wind turbine in accordance with the amount of energy consumed the prior year respectively. So voted 7-0.

- c) **Discussion on Facilities Report.** Mr. Carpender stated that the Facilities Report was presented at the last School Committee meeting, and the next step in the process is to determine how we are going to move forward. Mr. Buddemeyer made a motion to enlarge the existing Facilities Committee to include a larger community representation. He would like the committee to include a parent from each elementary school and the middle school, specifically from the PTOs, a member of the Town Council, an additional School Committee member, a representative from Administration and possibly an elementary principal and middle school principal or designee, as well as two other community members. The group would determine what option makes sense going forward for the educational system and the community. The group would look at what option provides the best educational environment, what is the most cost effective option based on the community's ability to pay, what resources are available to offset the cost of the chosen option (selling of land/building/property), redistribution (redistricting) of the school population for each option, what the transportation costs (or savings) for more or fewer buses per option, which option provides for the best cost savings (staff, consolidation of resources, etc.), and develop a timeframe for action. Mr. Buddemeyer would like to have this committee formed by March. The motion was seconded by Mr. Heaney. Mr. Carpender stated that Mr. Buddemeyer's committee was never given the charge to close Elmhurst within the next four months. It was a long-term effort to come up with the best options. His is a long-term facilities initiative. Mr. Heaney stated that in concept he agrees and is willing to support it; however, he is concerned with timeframe, as it is a situation that should be resolved sooner rather than later. Mr. Buddemeyer stated that we need to move quickly and decisively in order to have a well thought out plan in place before we make any move, so he would like to have the new subcommittee place by March 1. He wants a broad range of the community to be present. We're not going to satisfy every person in town. Dr. Lusi supports broadening the discussion and giving a broader group an opportunity to look at the options more carefully. Portsmouth resident Ian Mitchell spoke regarding the process. He is concerned that this problem may not be appropriately vetted out. He wants the committee to think about better ways to spend their intellectual capacity, such as an online think tank, a well-structured and well-managed think tank. Ideas could bubble to the surface. It is a good way to get more ideas. It is highly structured with targeted problems. Dr. Lusi stated that we will put something out. So voted 7-0.

- d) **Agenda Item Request – Discussion on the Possibility of Closing an Elementary School.** This item was requested by Elizabeth Dellenbaugh, and she thanked the

committee for granting her request and Dr. Lusi for her participation in the informational meeting at Elmhurst School last night. Mrs. Dellenbaugh asked the Committee to make sure they showed their work during the process of deciding how to move forward with the Facilities Report. She asked that they share their conclusions with the public as soon as they are able. She wants to know what the impact of closing the school will be on our students, what our facilities will be like, what the class sizes will be, how long the bus rides will be, what the budget savings will be for closing a school, the additional revenues that can be expected to flow to the Town from any future closing of a facility, etc. She stated that if salaries and benefits aren't addressed in the budget, we will continue to have a shortfall. She wants the Committee to show the public that closing an elementary school, if recommended, is part of a well thought out, long-term plan for Portsmouth. She wants to know how long that plan will take to put into place, how it will be funded, its impact on local housing values, and where it fits into the Future Search process. Mr. Carpender stated that many of Mrs. Dellenbaugh's questions will be answered during the process that Mr. Buddemeyer's group will be undertaking. He stated that the Facilities Committee meetings are open to the public, and Mr. Buddemeyer will be giving updates at the School Committee meetings. He pointed out that the dilemma is that at last week's joint meeting with the Town Council, the School Committee was asked if we would be closing a facility this year, and he responded that there isn't a member of the Committee or Administration that wants to close a school this year, but that it would be very irresponsible to not explore all budget savings options. He announced that the budget meetings would begin within the next several weeks. In response to the question raised at the last meeting regarding hiring someone to appraise Elmhurst School, Mr. Carpender stated that the Committee would not be having it appraised because it is Town property. The Town owns it and can sell it. He stated that we would certainly champion for them to sell it and use it to go towards a new school, but there are no guarantees. He stated that the Committee would not make any decisions unless they know that it makes financial sense. Mr. Buddemeyer stated that the decisions that the Committee comes up with will require a bond, and we need to stress to the Town Council that it is vital and important. Kelly Heitmann, President of the Elmhurst Parent Teacher Organization, stated that they would like the Committee to get a jump start on anticipating what will be the worst case, best case, and most likely scenarios. She encouraged everyone to start looking at this right now so that we can enlist the community to help think of solutions and alternatives. Mr. Carpender stated that this year, the Committee needs to prepare multiple budgets, and a timeline will be developed over the next five to six weeks. He stated that one of the worst things the Committee and Administration could do is speed up the process and make decisions on bad data.

- e) **Approval of December Financials.** Ms. Tague explained the December financials. On the Revenue side, the first quarter bill for Little Compton of \$243,517 was overstated. This overstatement was because of nine full-time students that had left the system prior to the commencement of the school year and two more students that left prior to the end of the first quarter. The adjusted amount that should have been billed and paid was

\$227,024. This adjustment will be reflected in the January financials. Once these adjustments are considered and assuming no additional changes, the revised projection for Little Compton tuitions would be \$908,096. This would result in a revenue shortfall of \$83,078. The year-to-date credits for Medicaid receipts for FY 2009 total \$200,000. At the last school committee meeting, an additional \$148,000 transfer was approved and will be reflected in the February financials. This transfer will result in the district meeting the budget objective for this line item. As stated in the Medicaid update report last month, we could realize an additional \$192,000 in receipts for the remainder of this fiscal year. This would assist in offsetting state aid cuts and the Little Compton shortfall. Regarding State Aid, Ms. Tague reported that we are still awaiting the outcome of legislative action concerning the Governor's supplemental budget that could result in revenue shortfalls of approximately \$180,000 for FY 2009. We are also awaiting more information on the FY 2009 impact, if any, concerning the teachers' retirement and the reduction of general aid by the same corresponding amount of \$734,195. We have been informed that it is a wash, but until we have further information, this is unclear. On the Expenditure side, Ms. Tague reported that we are still running a positive variance in salaries, once adjusted for encumbrances for all known salaries and budget allocations for contingency salary of about \$150,000. Currently, we now have only one long-term substitute as a result of a maternity leave; however we have been informed of five anticipated absences beginning in the spring. In addition most teachers do not utilize their personal time until the last quarter of the school year. While some of this has been factored into the projection, this positive variance could well be gone as a result of absences related to long-term absences and personal time. Concerning benefits, while our health care benefits are on track for this fiscal year, our experience to date on health care is running about 6 percent over the anticipated funding rate. This is primarily due to nine participants who have substantially higher claims than the norm but are way below our stop loss reinsurance rate. These nine participant claims alone comprise 24 percent of the total claims bill for the month. Ms. Tague will keep the Committee informed as this could result in a hefty increase for the upcoming Fiscal Year in the proposed funding rate. The Town is also seeing a similar aberration. Ms. Tague stated that in anticipation of state aid cuts, a directive has been given to all building level administrators who have budgetary control that spending must not exceed 80 percent of all line items for the remainder of this Fiscal Year. This directive will result in savings to offset state aid cuts of approximately \$133,400 excluding accounts for athletics and band. The additional impact if these line items were included in the 80 percent rule would be approximately another \$49,600. In the area of Utilities, Ms. Tague reported that while gasoline prices have gone down since last August, Portsmouth did participate in the EBEC bid for No. 2 fuel oil. This bid locked us in for the year at a price per gallon of \$3.45 until June 30, 2009. However, while the price of gasoline is dropping, the price of home heating fuel has still not dropped proportionately. She has contacted the members of the collaborative to see if the contract could be renegotiated. Ms. Tague reported that the electricity budget of \$291,754 is already spent by \$190,210 or 64.34 percent. This percentage amount spent to date is attributable to a reduction in the total budget for the anticipated

savings from the Wind Turbine project of approximately \$128,000. It is anticipated that the turbine will be fully functional by February 2009 to achieve the anticipated savings. Regarding other major expenses, Ms. Tague reported that in the Special Education Assessment area, the approved budget by the board for the Region is \$250,000 over the original budget. However, the savings in out-of-district placements of approximately \$400,000 will more than offset this variance. This variance was anticipated and will offset the regional cost increase because of more in district placements for the special needs students. The cost savings will continue to accrue as out of district tuition increases generally trend about 10 to 15 percent. Ms. Tague reported that we have received the first quarter bill for the regional vocational school of \$25,673. If this bill is projected out for the remainder of the fiscal year, our regional bill for the year would be \$102,692. We had budgeted \$150,000 and therefore could see a savings of \$47,308. She also reported that the transportation budget is currently running at 36.44 percent. While we appear to be ahead of budget, she asked the Committee to keep in mind that the budget is over a 9-month period. When taking this cycle into account, the projected transportation budget is on target. Regarding professional fees, the East Bay Educational Collaborative assessment of \$25,952 will be offset by a surplus distribution declared last fiscal year. Ms. Tague reported that the budget for this fiscal year appears to be within attainable levels, even with the projected state aid cuts (excluding teacher retirement cuts) as we have taken a proactive approach by holding the line on discretionary spending. While this is good news in a sense, the Committee and the public need to understand that holding this line means that we are unable to fully fund areas that have been School Committee priorities, particularly professional development and school-based budgets for items such as instructional materials. Ms. Wedge made a motion to approve the December financials as presented. Seconded by Mrs. Levesque. So voted.

- f) **Update on Legislative Discussion on 2008-09 and 2009-10 Budgets.** Dr. Lusi does not have any additional information to present on this item.
- g) **Discussion/Action – Amendment to Senate 3050.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to request that the General Assembly amends Senate 3050 such that growth in the tax base be excluded from the cap. Mr. Carpender stated that he went to Dr. Lusi and asked her to have Ms. Tague look into this. He stated that in Senate 3050, one of the articles indicated that the cap was based on the prior year's levy and that tax base growth in the Town could not be utilized to offset or to be used as a revenue stream for the School Department or Town. If we go to this year's limit of 4.75, and the tax base in this community grows by \$1.2 million, we can't use that as additional revenue; it has to go to reducing the appropriation on the tax rate even further. A lengthy discussion ensued. Ms. Tague stated that she received information on the residential value in Portsmouth. What Senate 3050 is doing is forcing growth communities to reduce their tax rate. Mr. Heaney stated that when you limit what you can levy, at some point, you will be in need of more services. He thinks this effort would be more forceful

if we got together with the Town Council. Mr. Carpender stated that we should communicate to the Town Council that we are going to do this. He stated that he would call the Town Council President about it, and he asked the audience and community to take this up with our representatives to try to get it on the table. The motion passed 7-0.

- h) **Update on Strategic Planning.** Dr. Lusi distributed the Strategic Planning timeline to the Committee. She stated that at the Future Search conference, we did not have students in attendance because many of them had athletic and other events to attend on Saturday and some of the students did not want to miss school on Friday. Dr. Lusi reported that this Friday morning at Portsmouth High School, a Student Appreciative Inquiry involving 50 students (10 from each grade, Grades 8 through 12) will take place. Our facilitator, Jan Williams, will be working with the students, and the information obtained from the session will be incorporated into the Strategic Planning process. Mrs. Cofield has been working on the report from the Future Search conference, and a draft will go to Jan Williams this week for her review. A smaller group will be working on drafting the Strategic Plan using information from Future Search, the Student Appreciative Inquiry, student surveys, the Berkshire performance audit, and any other available information. We hope to have the first draft of the plan available towards the end of April or early May, and we will bring it to the Committee, as well as back to the full group that participated in the Future Search.

7. **SUBCOMMITTEE AGENDA**

- a) **Finance.** Mr. Buddemeyer stated that it's time to set up a timeline for Finance Subcommittee meetings. He will coordinate this with Dr. Lusi.
- b) **Policy.** Ms. Wedge stated that we will be scheduling a meeting. Dr. Lusi stated that Mr. Blaess is putting a committee together to work on the student discipline policies. Mrs. Massarotti is also putting something together on how Central Registration works that may have implications for policy as well.
- c) **Facilities.** Nothing further to report.

A motion was made by Mr. Heaney and seconded by Ms. Volpicelli to adjourn the meeting. So voted 7-0. The meeting adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Patti Cofield
Recording Secretary for:

Marge Levesque, Clerk